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1945: CAPTAIN ECKHARDT RETURNS

THE HONORABLE WARREN D. WELLIVER*

In the fall semester of 1945, the first class of World War II veterans rose to attention as Professor Willard Eckhardt entered the classroom to teach Real Property I. We were starting our transition from war to civilian life via law school, which at that moment we viewed as “From Here to Eternity.” Standing before us was a man making his transition from Captain, United States Army, to newly appointed full professor of law. From this first meeting and the hours in the classroom that followed, there developed a warmth of friendship and comradeship between Mr. Eckhardt and the returning veterans that is rarely seen in ordinary teacher-student relationships. Most vivid in my memory of the Eckhardt classes was the respect that students and teacher had for each other.

Since that first meeting with Professor, later Dean, Eckhardt, I have been reminded on an almost daily basis of his scholarship; first, through the use of his texts in law school, and second, through my reliance on *Missouri Legal Forms*, written by Dean Eckhardt and Paul Peterson. In both instances, his writings were of the highest quality and were the most reliable source of authority.

Residing only a few houses down the street from the Eckhardts, I have had a unique opportunity to observe some of the traits that have distinguished Dean Eckhardt as a teacher of law. I believe these distinguishing traits are his belief in concentration on fundamentals, his practical common sense approach to the law, his loyalty to his students, and his sense of humor.

The Eckhardt class was noted for the professor’s concentration on fundamentals. He believed that as a teacher of the law, it was his function to prepare his students for the practice of law as it related to his field of property law—the examination of titles, the drafting of instruments, and the litigation of disputed issues. Each student who sat in his classes can attest that on graduation, he was prepared to practice law in the field of property.

It required more than knowing Dean Eckhardt in the classroom to appreciate the origin of his common sense approach to the law and its impact on his teaching. When Professor Eckhardt spoke of metes, bounds, links, chains, degrees, and surveys, few appreciated the fact that they were being taught and trained by a member of the Missouri State Land Survey Authority. Today Missouri is recognized as one of the best marked and surveyed

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Mr. Eckhardt served in the United States Army Air Corps
from 1942 to 1945.

A retiring Professor named Eckhardt,
Faced retirement with young but faint heart,
He feared a "bill of attainder"
Could make it a contingent remainder,
Leaving Bill where he was at the start.

(Author unknown.)¹

Having known, admired, and respected Dean Eckhardt, I found myself searching for a word or phrase that describes all of my feelings about the man. In my search I found that immediately following his graduation from Illinois University Law School, Yale University named him a Sterling Fellow for the year of 1937-1938. He then merited the title by reason of his academic achievement in law school. At his retirement, he is judged not on three years of scholastic performance, but on lifetime performance. To me, nothing could better describe Bill Eckhardt than to say that in every respect, he has been a "Sterling Fellow" and that he now retires a "Sterling Fellow."

1. Very possibly not appropriate for such an auspicious occasion is the following:

A Professor named Eckhardt, retired
Not for age, but because he was tired
To Blackacre for life,
With Sarah, his wife,
Who loyally stays, tho' Bill's becoming "unfired."
(Author *really* unknown.)